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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/12/2016

TAGS: PGOV PNAT KDEM I2

SUBJECT: TRIBAL SHEIKH WANTS TO BE BIGGER THAN SCIRI

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBERT S. FORD FOR  
REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶11. (C) In a March 4 conversation, Sheikh Talib al-Yasseri of Najaf told PolOffs that the politicians who were elected in the December 15 elections do not represent the ordinary people of Iraq. "There was much fraud," he said, "but the people remain silent. The winners passed over the heads of ordinary Iraqis." In order to build a truly democratic Iraq, al-Yasseri said, it is necessary to "win over ordinary Iraqis."

¶12. (C) To this end, al-Yasseri asked PolOffs to help him secure Embassy support for his fledgling political party, the Arabic Coalition for Iraq. "If supported," Al-Yasseri said, "this party would be a force allied with the United States." Al-Yasseri continued stating that he has a long history of working with Coalition Forces (CF), and as proof gave PolOffs a photo copy of a letter of introduction and recommendation dated December 28, 2003, that he had received from Headquarters, U.S. Army 352nd Civil Affairs Command (Baghdad) acknowledging his help to the unit. With CF help, Al-Yasseri predicted his political party could be a force greater than SCIRI or the Sadr Bureau. To further prove his point, al-Yasseri showed PolOffs approximately 50 letters from tribal sheikhs in southern and south-central Iraq pledging support. These letters included 12 tribal leaders in the Baghdad area, ten from Najaf, five from Karbala, and five from Basrah.

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Comment  
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¶13. (C) Al-Yasseri is a political outsider looking for his big break. His party was listed on the December 15 ballot and received only 170 votes, winning no seats. While he has worked with CF in the past, his motives appear to be somewhat self-serving. During the meeting he told PolOffs several times that they should "listen only to him," and should not deal with other political leaders. Subsequent to the meeting, PolOffs provided al-Yasseri with contact information for NDI and IRI offices so he could take advantage of their democratization programs. We often find tribal leaders coming to us hoping to find support to build political organizations. We find very few who come with a plan, or resources, to actually build something operational.

KHALILZAD